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Interplanetary traveler known throughout the world

By DARRELL LAURANT
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SALEM, Va. (AP)—The weird thing about William Goodlett is that there's nothing weird about him.

He lives in a big, broad-shouldered Victorian house on an Anytown, U.S.A. side street in Salem. The house is cluttered as only someone who reads four books a week can clutter it.

He seemed glad that I had stopped by on a recent Friday morning, but said he didn't have much time to talk to me.

"I've got to run off at 11:30," he told me. "I'm secretary of the Diner's Club, and we've got a meeting."

It was just after 10 a.m. Goodlett was dressed in mouse-colored slacks, a slightly-darker sweater, a flannel shirt (obviously an old friend), faded running shoes and a western string tie. A robust 78 years old, he resembled everyone's favorite grandfather. When he talked about his travels which have been extensive, to say the least his eyes crinkled and twinkled.

Either Goodlett had sized me up as open-minded, or else he didn't care. In his occasional glances in my direction, there was no hesitation, no unspoken "you may think I'm nuts, but . . ."

"I have done astral projection my whole life," he said quietly. "I've been all over the world."

Not to mention the galaxy.

A few weeks earlier, a friend had called and asked, "Have you ever interviewed an extra-terrestrial?"

Negative. Gurus, yes. Howard Cosell, yes. A snake swallower, yes. So far, though, my interview subjects have been limited to this planet. My slogan is "Earth: Love It or Leave It."

But I was curious, nonetheless.

"I think you'd enjoy hearing this fellow speak to Rosie McKnight's class at CVCC," my caller said. "He'll be there on Halloween."

Alas, I missed him then (it was my daughter's last year for trick or treat), but I did manage to call Goodlett and set up an interview. And in doing a bit of research, I found out that he is a very big deal in the world of astral projection, interplanetary travel and the like.

Ruth Montgomery's best-seller "Aliens Among Us" devotes an entire chapter to him. She calls Goodlett "one of the most fascinating men I ever met."

I had to agree. Even forgetting the astral projection stuff, Goodlett is unusual. He is an artist. He has taught dance, pioneered a method of teaching reading phonetically and served as a cryptographer in World War II.

And he says he travels to other planets—not just Mars or Saturn. He says he goes to anonymous worlds like "The Planet of the Tall Trees" and "The Planet of the Small Islands."

How?

"I just go," Goodlett said. "I ask to go, and that's it."

Sometimes his requests go unheeded. It happens every few years, and he travels outside of his body.

OK, I thought dreams, vivid dreams. Goodlett shook his head gently, as if correcting a stubborn child.

"With dreams, I'm outside looking in," he said. "I know what a dream is. This is different. I'm there."

When he returns, he makes drawings. He showed me a dozen or so, incredibly elaborate and bizarre, filled with creatures and landscapes unlike anything I had ever seen.

You may be interested to know that William Goodlett is not alone. Actress-author Shirley MacLaine has gone on record as believing in astral projection and out-of-body experiences. The Monroe Institute in Amherst County has been set up to study them. Goodlett gets supportive calls from all over the world, he pointed out, many congratulating him for "coming out of the closet."

Which is nice. But Goodlett doesn't care if people think he's eccentric. Back in 1978, he told me, he died of a heart attack.

"I was sitting in that chair," he said, pointing toward an overstuffed wingback in a corner of his kitchen. "And my heart stopped. I felt myself coming out of my body. I heard beautiful music. I moved toward a light, and then something told me to go back. Since then, I haven't feared death."

Or ridicule.

By Goodlett's estimate, thousands of planets in our solar system harbor life, and "600 or so that have humans. I've seen creatures just like us," he said.

Viewers of the movie "Starman" may know what Goodlett is talking about. He believes that interplanetary travelers always adopt the life form predominant on their planet of origin ("When in Rome . . ."), and that some of them have visited earth.

He believes that he is or has been one of these and that he can recognize others.

"Occasionally," Goodlett said, "I find people I can communicate with telepathically."

Perhaps he tried in my case. Perhaps not. But something about the man's sincerity stayed with me.